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2007 State of the County Address
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Good afternoon. Thank you all for being here and for your interest in the state of Macomb County.

It's a great honor to deliver the annual State of Macomb County address this year. We will review accomplishments made throughout the past year and take a look at the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead.

Thank you to the Macomb County Alliance of Chambers and Citizens First Bank for sponsoring this event.

There is an ancient proverb which says: "May you live in interesting times." Maybe, instead of a proverb, we could say that was a curse! Because, folks, no matter what our particular differences of opinion may be about some issues, I know that we can all agree that we live in *very* interesting times.

While times are truly "interesting" I would also assert that we are living in the midst of one of the most creative times in history. The 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century have seen staggering amounts of change. It has been said that all you could depend on in life were death and taxes; I say that we can depend on change as well.

Since changes are inevitable, we must embrace the opportunity to affect the new directions to which changes lead us. It is interesting and exciting to watch new solutions emerge and to be in a position to help initiate change.

As you know, this year we experienced a change in leadership at the County Board level. I am honored to have been chosen for the role of Board Chairman.

I would like to take a moment to honor my predecessor, former Chair Nancy White. I respect the things she accomplished on her watch. She set a precedent for bi-partisan cooperation on the Board of Commissioners that I intend to continue. I understand that she has embraced retirement and is working diligently to reduce her golf handicap.

The Board of Commissioners welcomed six new faces on January 1st. Join me in welcoming:

- Commissioner Ed Bruley, representing District 17 – Clinton Township and Mt. Clemens;
- Commissioner Leon Drolet, representing District 26 – Macomb Township;
- Commissioner David Flynn, representing District 8 – Sterling Heights;
- Commissioner Sarah Roberts, representing District 24 – St. Clair Shores;
- Commissioner Kathy Tocco, representing District 20 – Fraser and southern Clinton Township; and
- Commissioner Carey Torrice, representing District 16 – Clinton Township.

Will both the newest and the veteran members of the Board of Commissioners who are here please stand and be recognized?

As Commissioners, we wear many hats. We sit as a group and as individuals on governing bodies of numerous other agencies, boards and commissions. We represent our county's interests as well as our entire region at state and national levels. While serving the county as a whole, each commissioner also has special interest and responsibilities to the constituents of his or her district.

The challenges of this job are formidable and our goals are ambitious. But whatever our differences may be, we are bound by the same facts. We know that we need to maintain excellent services without raising taxes and without jeopardizing jobs. We must keep our county moving forward by attracting new ventures and retaining existing business.

We must continue to let the world know what we already know ... that Macomb County is a great place to live, work and play.

Together as a Board, we will continue to foster a mutually respectful relationship with union representation and employees. Commissioners and constituents alike appreciate the excellent services that employees continue to provide to Macomb County residents year after year.

Thanks to the amazing effort put forth by our employees, Macomb County departments - for the 25th consecutive year - again won the most National Association of Counties (NACo) "Achievement Awards" in the state of Michigan.

We value the leadership and direction of our Department Heads and elected officials throughout the county. We also acknowledge the diligent work of key leaders throughout the region and at the state level.

We value and honor the families of the soldiers from across the nation who are currently serving around the world in patriotic duty. The call to serve in our military is answered by a precious few. We appreciate their service and sacrifice and also that of their families.

Please take a moment in silence with me to honor the memory of those 130 Michigan soldiers who made the ultimate sacrifice during the Iraq War.

Freedom Hill County Park now houses a physical symbol of our county's appreciation for veterans. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial is comprised of a granite wall with the engraved names of 149 Macomb County veterans who were killed in the war. We are proud to honor their service with the Memorial.

The Macomb Fallen Heroes Memorial is currently under construction at Freedom Hill. This memorial will honor Macomb County police, firefighters and EMS personnel who died in the line of duty. We appreciate those who gave so dearly to keep us safe.

Our Veterans Services Department staff and dedicated volunteers continue to offer veterans and their families support in obtaining benefits. We appreciate their tireless efforts to make sure veterans receive what they truly earned and deserve.

It's difficult to define Macomb County in a few words. According to SEMCOG, our population currently stands at just over 840,000. Macomb County is a place to call home, an employment center for commuters from neighboring counties and a destination for fun. It is subdivisions, busy roads, industrial corridors, farmland, lakefront parks, beautiful Lake St. Clair and the access it provides to all the Great Lakes and our good neighbor Canada.

More than anything, Macomb County is a vital, active, caring community – not just a collection of homes and businesses. And that's what sets us apart.

Last year a group called Focus Macomb was formed. This is an organization of people who truly care and believe in working for Macomb County's future.

Nearly 100 leaders in business, education, healthcare and government belong to this group. They volunteered a total of 650 individual hours over the past year to develop a set of recommendations which were presented to the Board.

This year, Focus Macomb and the Board will explore how the recommendations can be implemented within the county's fiscal capabilities.

The spirit of volunteerism and enthusiasm demonstrated by this group clearly indicates their level of commitment to a better future for Macomb County. What a great example of developing a true partnership between county government and the private sector.

Will the representatives from Focus Macomb please stand and be recognized.

Our County departments routinely work as a team, both with the private sector and within the government. The synergy created by these cooperative efforts result in great programs for residents.

For example, the Senior Citizen Services Department is working with the Sheriff's Office, Environmental Services and Water Quality to provide information to seniors on proper disposal of prescription and other drugs. This will protect our water system and prevent use of old medications by the senior or family members.

When residents are summoned to jury duty, they are provided with the opportunity to request library books via the Internet. The County Clerk/Register of Deeds offices work together to ensure the requested materials are delivered to the Jury Room.

The Macomb County Department of Planning and Economic Development and Macomb County Parks and Recreation together developed a program that informs the general public how they can get involved in building the Macomb Orchard Trail.

MSU Extension and Michigan State University, as part of the V8 Gateway Collaborative (LISC) grant, worked together to develop a citizen opinion survey. The survey targeted residents of Center Line, Warren and Detroit who live within the V8 Gateway boundaries, (Van Dyke and Eight Mile Road), and looked at a number of neighborhood issues. The Department of Planning and Economic Development and other V8 partners will use the survey results to develop action plans for the revitalization of the business, commercial and residential areas of the Gateway region.

The Department of Planning and Economic Development has been working diligently to help our business community weather the continuing challenge of an evolving economy. Among those businesses most affected are automotive suppliers. Through programs targeted to help this industry, the Planning Department directly assisted Macomb County manufacturers in investing more than \$155 million in new machinery and technology last year.

This investment translates into saving jobs and creating new ones. Specifically, more than 1,400 jobs were retained and 1,600 jobs were created.

Recognizing the power of attracting business in the age of technology and the internet, the macombbusiness.com web site was developed under the guidance of the Planning & Economic Development Department last year. The site now generates over 4,000 hits per week and was honored by the Michigan Economic Developer's Association as the "Best" economic development web site in Michigan.

Other economic development highlights throughout the county this past year included investment by Cadence Innovation in Chesterfield Township, Faurecia in Fraser and Sterling Heights and Global Automotive Systems in Roseville.

Automotive OEMs Ford, GM and DaimlerChrysler have invested more than \$1.2 billion in their Macomb County manufacturing facilities over the past year.

Health care companies continue to invest in the county. Between the new Beaumont facility in Sterling Heights, the Children's Hospital of Michigan Stilson Specialty Center in Clinton Township, and the new St. John Medical Center in Macomb Township, health care investment is close to a half a billion dollars.

Retail investment and development in the county tops well over \$265 million.

Sterling Heights is home to several major economic development investments. The Target Center at 16 Mile and Dequindre is a \$22 million retail project and the redevelopment of Sterling Ponds at 14 Mile and Van Dyke represents a \$20 million investment.

Construction on another major retail project -the new Partridge Creek Mall - is on track with a completion date set for mid-October. This will be the first regional shopping center built in Macomb County in over 30 years. Two of the mall's anchors, Nordstrom and Parisian, are Macomb County firsts.

Other new major retail investments include the 80-acre Bay River development and the 188-acre Chesterfield Town Center.

The Shops At Stony Creek development is also expected to open later this year in Shelby Township. It will be anchored by a Phoenix Theatre complex.

We are looking forward to bringing more people into the county for great shopping, entertainment and job opportunities.

The Macomb/St. Clair Workforce Development Board last year registered over 50,500 adults for employment in the state's Talent Bank. Michigan Works! retrained dislocated workers and economically disadvantaged adults, provided skills enhancements, work readiness and employment for youth, helped incumbent workers enhance skills and placed almost 2,000 public assistance recipients into employment.

We will continue efforts to help Macomb County workers upgrade skills and to assist unemployed and public assistance recipients in securing jobs that will lead to self-sufficiency.

We will also continue to see to it that low-income workers in Macomb County have access to health plans.

The Macomb Health Plan's latest phase – called Macomb Blue – was successfully implemented at the end of last year. This program offers small businesses with low wage employees in Macomb County participation in the program. The employer pays \$80 a month, the employee pays \$80 and Macomb Health Plan pays the remaining monthly premium for coverage through Blue Care Network insurance. The program has already started enrollment and is beginning to grow.

Last August the Board approved the addition of the Discount Dental Program to the existing Prescription/Vision/Hearing Discount Card. For the yearly cost of \$69 per household, members receive a 20-60% discount on dental services from participating providers. The program is available to all residents of Macomb County and will help families and seniors meet their dental needs. There are currently over 700 families enrolled in the Dental Discount Program. Each member household will realize an annual savings of about a thousand dollars.

The Discount Dental Program operates at no cost whatsoever to the county. And, it is the first county-sponsored program of its kind in the nation. Several counties are now working to develop similar programs by following our example.

We've placed increased emphasis on protecting employees' health and on encouraging good health habits. Macomb County's Healthstyles Committee has developed activities designed to improve employee well-being and fitness.

A strong emphasis on employee wellness is an important part of reducing future healthcare costs.

Our population is aging. More than 7,900 baby boomers across the nation turned 60 each and every day last year; that amounts to 330 sixtieth birthdays every hour. That trend is also evident right here in Macomb County. However – and I can personally attest to this – today's senior is not just "old" – today's senior is "active and vibrant!"

Many seniors are still working, caring for extended families and quite possibly even raising their grandchildren. Most of today's seniors are still living in the home in which they raised their families. Many adult children have returned to their childhood homes with their families due to loss of jobs or foreclosure.

We will acknowledge these changes when responding to younger seniors' needs and let them know about services available to address them.

Great events like the annual Older Americans Festival, and programs such as Grandparents Raising Grandchildren support groups and activities, Medicare Part D education and enrollment support, victim liaison programs, resource advocacy and many others will continue.

Our efforts to improve all residents' health continued last year and will remain one of our focus areas.

The EPA- and locally-funded Drinking Water Protection Project will become fully operational by the end of this year. This monitoring network stretches from Lake Huron to Lake Erie and will continuously monitor drinking water. The data collected is immediately reviewed to protect public health in the event contaminants are detected. The public will have access to the information via the Internet.

Macomb County is taking steps to educate residents on prevention of chronic disease and maintaining good health. Coronary heart disease is America's number one killer. Stroke is number three and is a leading cause of serious disability.

The county's Cardiovascular Disease Risk Reduction Program screened more than 7,400 individuals for heart disease, high blood pressure and high cholesterol. Nearly 1,900 students received prevention services as part of the Healthy Kids Healthy Hearts school based presentations.

Thirty-two "Lunch and Learn" programs were piloted in worksites and municipal offices throughout the county. These presentations educated people on healthy nutrition, quitting smoking, stress reduction and fitness level improvement.

Macomb County's elderly were assisted through the Senior Citizen Nutrition and Chore Service programs. The Meals-on-Wheels program delivered meals directly to homebound seniors and 23 Dining Senior Style sites offered social opportunities with hot lunch meals.

More than 9,600 low-income Macomb County residents received emergency assistance, weatherization, education and training, transportation as well as information and referrals from three Community Action Centers.

We will continue to offer comprehensive educational, economic and social services to Macomb County's residents in need. We will continue to fight the causes and effects of poverty.

And, ladies and gentlemen, we have a serious fight on our hands. There are 1,142 homeless people – 193 of which are children - right here in Macomb County. That's up 195 from the last official count in January 2005.

The Macomb County Homeless Coalition is working hard, but funding has fallen while the homeless population continues to rise. Macomb Together - Helping at Home has raised \$25,000, but donations have slowed.

We must face the uncomfortable issue of the homeless population. It exists everywhere, it is increasing, but we can do something to help.

The Continuum of Care agency, which is under the umbrella of the Macomb County Community Services Agency, is a mechanism used to move homeless people from the streets to permanent, safe housing. This attempts to prevent gaps in the system addressing homelessness. The agency was recently granted more than \$770,000 in funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The funds will help the Community Housing Network, MCREST and the Macomb Homeless Coalition.

Our Community Mental Health Department plans to assemble a Homeless Outreach Team this year. This team will support an initiative which aims to improve access to mental health support services and treatment in non-traditional settings for the homeless. These non-traditional settings include shelters, interaction directly on the streets and in other locations where the homeless typically gather.

The “2-1-1” national telephone community resource and referral line became available in Macomb County last year. 2-1-1 is linked to the Macomb County Crisis Center and provides callers with simple resource referrals to human service providers in their community. The service is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week and is toll-free from any landline phone.

We are making the necessary adaptations to accommodate a changing world.

The Health Department has maintained and improved its preparedness for bioterrorism and other emergencies. This includes completion of staff training in the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and an increased focus on community-based exercises and education.

The Macomb County 800 MHz radio system went into full operation on November 28, 2006. The project was nine months ahead of schedule and \$350,000 *under* budget. Macomb County is a leader in establishing communications capability for all police, fire and EMS agencies in a major urban area.

This is important in two respects: First, it provides increased capacity and guaranteed portable radio coverage; second, we now have statewide coverage. This is very important for today’s concerns in regard to Homeland Security.

Emergency Management’s Mobile Command Vehicle is now fully operational. The vehicle provides a central location for multiple response personnel to coordinate an on-scene response to any type of emergency, disaster or pre-planned event.

Last November ground was broken for the new Macomb County Medical Examiner Facility. This new 6,000 square foot building, which is expected to be completed this summer, will enable the medical examiner to properly perform the complex job duties that are faced in today's world.

Are there any changes increasing in speed and complexity that can compare with the advances in information technology?

Macomb County recognizes that strategic investments in information technology are the ones to sustain it over the years. Initiatives from our Information Technology Department continue to expand as web-enabled services are emphasized and we move towards a paperless environment.

This simple, but important precept is now being recognized outside of Macomb's borders.

This past year, the IT Department was honored with several first place Michigan Excellence in Technology awards, including the top two awards: IT Visioning and IT Leadership.

Vision and leadership are key points we hope to contribute to the programs we are working on with our regional partners.

Macomb County is committed to working with neighboring counties on projects to benefit the entire region. We are involved in the "One D" initiative, look forward to the Mackinac Policy Conference, and will participate in "Cover the Uninsured Week."

We are actively involved in the Eight Mile Boulevard Association and the Detroit Metro Convention and Visitors Bureau. Macomb County will continue to address issues concerning regional transportation and funding with our regional partners.

We know that the success of the region requires the cooperation and equal participation from Wayne and Oakland and Macomb counties.

Macomb County is at the table and we have an equal voice in regional matters.

In the near future, our county must grapple with the issue of changing from the current system of government to the county executive form of leadership.

I absolutely favor the creation of a Macomb County Executive. I have found the present system to be slow, cumbersome and inefficient.

Macomb County was formally organized on January 15, 1818. That's more than 188 years ago. We've come a long way and we've got further to go.

However, a change in county government that will affect the next several decades deserves to be undertaken with thoughtful consideration. We have the responsibility to gather all the facts and unbiased information for a decision of this magnitude.

We must base our actions and decisions on how they affect the next generation, not just the next election.

Before Wayne County brought the County Executive issue before the electorate, it had a very comprehensive study done by the Citizens Research Council of Michigan, a non-profit research source. This helped the people of Wayne and Oakland counties develop their county government. Each of these counties has had their forms of leadership for more than 25 years now. We have the opportunity to learn from their experiences.

It is crucial that we obtain a *current* research study to explore our options. Macomb County is unique and differs in many ways from Wayne and Oakland County. I believe our county government should also reflect Macomb's individuality.

One size does not fit all.

We need to examine all the possible ways to organize a new form of county government and choose what is best for Macomb County in the long run.

As a Board, we need to be vigilant with the budget. We must use existing funds more efficiently, not simply cry for more. We must evaluate our programs based on their results, not their intentions.

Put simply, we must be diligent and responsible with the management of the County's finances this coming year and we must confront the structural problems which are at the root of our financial difficulties.

We must avoid any quick fixes – rather, we need to thoughtfully examine programs and services, maintaining some, adjusting others, even eliminating a few, while still serving the needs of our community.

We need to ensure our economic strength over the long haul. We enjoy a Triple A bond rating. Macomb County's history and practice of sound fiscal management will help to weather this storm, but it will not be an easy or comfortable process. The Board of Commissioners is committed to remaining focused on those things which are paramount to residents while balancing a complex budget.

Your commissioners cannot do it alone. We need your advice, help, vision, investments, time, talents and dedication to Macomb County and its future.

Although I know there are challenges and changes that lie ahead of us in 2007, I am excited about the future. Macomb County is a safe, clean, caring community. We have economic, cultural and recreational opportunities.

I look forward to a productive year ahead; I'm sure it will be interesting.
